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THE MESSAGE OF BUDDHISM TO CHRISTIANITY

PROFESSOR E. WASHBURN HOPKINS, PH.D., LL.D.
Yale University, New Haven, Conn.

In his interesting book on *Buddhism and its Christian Critics*, Dr. Paul Carus cites the opinion of an early English student of Buddhism, Spence Hardy, who laid it down as an axiom that "to be a Christian a man must regard Buddha as a false teacher." He adds that the missionary Gutzlaff, a German who shared this opinion, says: "If ever any work contained nonsense, it is the religious code of Buddha." But we know that a few years ago any religion was apt to be thus characterized by those not in sympathy with its fundamental teaching. Buddha's "code" may be learned better from Buddha than from any European, and one of the Buddhist scriptures thus condenses the religion taught by him who, five centuries before the advent of Christ, was hailed as the *dīpo lokassa*, the "Lamp of the World":

To abandon all wrong-doing,
To lead a virtuous life,
And cleanse one's mind.
That is the religion of all the Enlightened.

A religion which has molded millions of men for more than two thousand years may be in part open to adverse criticism, but it probably contains truth and wisdom as well as falsity and foolishness. At any rate, this religion is at present winning in the West converts who claim that Buddhism is a higher religion than Christianity. It is then important for us to know what is valuable in this alien faith, and to see whether these truths which appear both in it and in Christianity are equally emphasized in both. If not, should we shift the emphasis in accordance with the new light received from Buddhism? Whatever we can learn from such considerations may be construed as a recommendatory message to us from the strange religion. On the other hand, we may ask: What, if any, are the defects and failures of Buddhism? The answer to this question also may be helpful and salutary.

What is unessential in Buddhism may here be passed over. The accuracy of tradition in regard to Buddha's life and the growth of the church is unessential. That the great teacher lived in the sixth century before Christ; that he devoted himself to teaching; that his teaching weakened the bonds of caste and for the first time gave India a religion which passed beyond the limits of nationality; that for a thousand years the religion instituted by him retained a deep hold upon his people, and then, expanding, reached China and Japan, so that it has since been influential in the farther East, while the prophet gradually lost honor in his own country—all this is unessential to the doctrine. Nevertheless, the bare facts are helpful in understanding the change of ideals found in older and newer Buddhism. So, too, may be omitted, in speaking of the doctrine, all discussion of the church congresses which a doubtful tradition assigns to various periods after Buddha's death; but it is as well to remember that within little more than a century after that event the church was already contentious and discordant with itself on various petty points.

But what is essential is to understand the aims and ideals of Buddhism, as presented by the earlier and later organization. To do this it will be necessary to know something of the problems met and solved by the earlier and later church. The view of the earlier church, primitive Buddhism, is probably nearer to that of Buddha himself; that of the later church is a combination of this with primitive ante-Buddhistic animism and later spiritualism. When speaking of the older belief, I shall call it Buddhistic as emanating approximately from Buddha. Likewise Buddhism, in distinction from the later school which is called "great" by its adherents, will mean in this essay the faith first delivered to the saints—primitive Buddhism, not the pseudo-Buddhism of Tibet, China, and Japan.¹

In Buddhism, then, we find an early attempt to steer between the dangers of dualism and those of monism. Buddhism arose when the thinkers of India offered three chief solutions of man's

¹ This distinction can be maintained only approximately, since even the first records of Buddha's teaching do not revert to his own time. But in general it is clear that a discourse depreciating the value of miracles, for example, will be more likely to reflect Buddha's own ideas than a legend of miracles performed by Buddha; and so in other cases.

being. This self, which everyone feels is not the body, was affirmed by some to be material like the body and to perish with it. The dualist said: "No, the self is soul, eternal, like matter, which is a form of mind. The soul survives as a separate entity." The monist said: "There is indeed an entity separate from matter, but it is part of the supreme All-Soul, with which it will eventually be united." Matter is (according to one school of the monist belief) only an illusion. But the dualist and monist were one in regarding the self as an individual entity; it is "a man within," either eternally distinct from matter, or temporarily separated from the world-soul; but in either case the self is a separate entity.

Buddha denied the existence of a separate soul-entity. Properly speaking, there is no psychology in Buddhism, because no psyche is recognized, although the self is not one with the body. What, then, is the self? The answer to this is given in terms of modern science. A man's self is his activities, mental, vocal, bodily. What a man thinks, says, does, is his self, himself. There is no separate indwelling soul, no "man within;" there is the sum total of activities, and that is one's self. Our "character" comes near to the idea. But these activities are not all original with the individual man. They are individualized in him, and will be reindividualized in another body, which because of these activities starts into existence.² There can be no end to these reindividualizations till an end be put to the cause of reindividualization. What is this cause? Professor Rhys Davids, in his Hibbert Lectures, refers to an interesting parallel to the answer given by Buddha. Plato says that, when a soul has been without a body for some time, it is reincarnated, owing to its "desire for the corporeal." So desire for the corporeal, for the worldly life, is the root of reincarnation. The Buddhist means by desire, which he calls "thirst," a self-centered desire. Because of craving and attachment are the activities reindividualized, born again, usually in human form. When this craving thirst ceases, then cease the activities, extinguished like a lamp when the oil goes out. That is the end of individuality, and it is

² Nothing is carried over to the new being, but the new arises with the activities of the former being. Thus parentage, though usual, is not necessary, and one may be born as an *opapātika* (god or human) being without parents, but incorporating former activities. Compare the history of Kosiya in *Jātaka*, 535.

a happy end, because, as Professor Rhys Davids has sufficiently explained, individuality implies separateness—that is, limitation; limitation implies ignorance; and ignorance implies error. Belief in soul as a separate entity, conceived as an individuality constantly separate from the rest of existence, leads to the endeavor to keep oneself apart from existence as a whole, like a bubble trying to remain separate from the sea; whereas man should seek union with the rest of existence, oneness with past and present.

But the means to this end is not withdrawal from natural life. Buddha tried and rejected asceticism. The ascetic hates what should be neither hated nor loved. Serenity should be sought. Asceticism and sensuality are both, in Buddha's own words, "ignoble." Neither extreme is countenanced. But there is a middle way which leads to insight, peace, extinction (of evil). This is the "noble eightfold way;" it consists in right views, aspirations, speech, and acts; in right life (not injurious to others), in right effort (in self-control), right mindfulness (having a watchful mind, and in right meditation (on life's realities).

Here for the first time occurs in the teaching of Buddha the word "extinction," the "blowing-out," as of a lamp, of lust, ill-will, and delusion. The attainment of this extinction connotes extinction of the root of reindividualization. The activities survive while the man's body survives, but the man who even in this life has extinguished all attachment to evil ceases to exist when his body dies, because there is nothing to cause reindividualization; his activities have become barren, and there is no more fruit. An endless course of reindividualization is sorrow; so birth and death, being grievous and resulting from evil desire, may be stopped by extinction of this desire, and this is effected by following the "noble way." In consciousness, as it becomes purified, individuality finds less support, and so gradually ceases to exist.

Salvation in Buddha's scheme is thus placed upon a philosophical foundation. It is, indeed, not a scientific foundation which carries conviction today. Three defects in it may be noted here. First, if only previous activities (of a former state) cause rebirth, what caused the first birth? Second, what reason is there for the assumption that activities are reindividualized in some other person when

the recipient of these activities is not the descendant of the body in which they were individualized? Some modern Buddhists have confounded the Buddhistic doctrine with the modern theory of heredity, with which it has nothing to do. For, though there is a quasi-inheritance, it is not from father to son. The presence of still co-ordinated activities in a new body of a god, man, animal, or plant caused by those activities is a pure hypothesis, as it is pure assumption when it is claimed that a residuum of evil desire exists at all. It cannot, then, be said truly, as has been said, that Buddhism is "the only religion free of hypothesis," nor can it even be said that the hypothesis made is probable. A third objection to the Buddhistic interpretation is that in Buddhistic teaching the new individual is endowed with memory of his past deeds, although nothing is supposed to pass over from one individual to another. The *Jātaka* stories, the *Visuddhi Magga*, the *Sāmanna-phala Sutta*, all recognize this ability to remember the past, and, in fact, it permeates the popular presentation of Buddhism, though it may be of later growth.

But, although these objections are sufficient to restrain anyone today from accepting the Buddhistic scheme as a scientific religion adequate to present-day needs, they do not militate against the claim that Buddha's religion is essentially a rational religion. Traditional belief is still preserved, though in a modified form; but traditional authority, scriptural authority, is rejected. Buddha argues on the basis of facts as he understands them, but he does not accept teachings because they have been handed down from the fathers. The Brahmanic idea of received authority being definitive authority is not even suggested, or is suggested only to be set aside as an empty idea without rational support.

But the scheme of salvation is not placed upon an intellectual apperception of truth alone. It is based equally upon an ethical foundation. This is to throw over all ceremonial purification. The heart must be pure, not the hand. Sacrifice is not only inefficient; it is deleterious, because even to plan a sacrifice contemplates both the renunciation of one's own endeavor and at the same time the suffering of an innocent animal. Man must work out his own salvation, not be dependent on gods or outer forms. There is left

a religion without appeal to inspiration and without dependence on formal works. All the more is it essential that man should save himself by works, namely by the practice of the ethical and disciplinary rules contained in the exposition of the true belief.

But, again, this belief is not grounded upon knowledge hard to acquire. Right knowledge is not recondite; there is no esoteric Buddhism. All that is necessary is to recognize the truths of life as admitted by all, and act accordingly. For this reason Buddha especially deprecates all metaphysical speculations as a useless waste of time. Again and again he refuses to discuss such subjects; they were to him vain theories. To aid one's neighbor, he said, is better than to discuss metaphysics. His is a religion of poetical philosophy, pragmatic, not concerned with "views." All secondary matter he set aside as of small moment. Miracles, he says, may be performed, but of what use are they? If a disciple teaches the true gospel, that is better than to perform a miracle. Should one, he is asked, maintain the sacred fires? He replies playfully that they should be maintained. The father and the mother are sacred fires which one should maintain. As to prayer, he says that to know oneself is better than prayer; to conquer oneself is better than sacrifice. To conquer oneself is to conquer one's sorrow. There is no need of a priest. There is no soul. There is no God. There is, as far as man can see, only man and misery. Religion consists not in vain hopes and vain beliefs, but in freeing oneself from misery. This can be accomplished without speculation and without delay. Salvation is free to all; it is easy to get; it "takes no time." Let every man be his own priest. There is no caste in religion. Even a man of the lowest, most despised caste may become a member of the order and shares honor equally with the greatest.

Here for the first time in the history of India "a man's a man for a' that." Once Buddha was asked the crucial question whether one ought to serve a Brahman and show respect to men of the upper castes. He replies:

I say neither that one should nor that one should not perform services for the higher castes. If one in serving another becomes worse, one should not serve such a one; but if in serving another one thereby becomes better, then should he perform the service. If, when one serves anyone else, one increases in faith, in righteousness, in knowledge, in renunciation, then one should serve such a one.

Owing to the point of view taken by Buddha, the ethical ideal is a combination of virtue and insight. Justice is the root of virtue; force is always wrong. Every weapon must be laid aside. All wars are iniquitous. Affection and pity for the world must take the place of hate and conquest of the world. The great conqueror is not a conqueror by arms, but a conqueror by friendliness and teaching. In other points the ethical rules are like those of Christianity: not to steal, to be chaste, not to lie, to shun abuse, not to talk foolishly. But, in consequence of a wider sympathy for all living creatures, we find also the rule that one should not hurt any sentient thing. The middle way also requires moderation in eating and sleeping, etc.; ending with the injunction that one should not be superstitious nor discontented.³

It is remarkable that Buddha foresaw how short would be the period during which his teaching would prevail. He said that his gospel in its purity would last but five hundred years. As a matter of fact, it was not long after his death when, with the admission of unworthy persons into the order, animism regained its hold on the friars, and by the middle of the third century B. C. corruption had already set in. The gospel was no longer taught in its purity. Even one generation after Buddha we find a friar, who has seen Buddha in person, complaining that virtue and wisdom were already passing away, and that the teacher's gospel was given up in favor of sensual and frivolous behavior on the part of the friars, who no longer went to grove and solitary tree to meditate, clothed only against cold, but, quarrelsome and heretical, they pursued false doctrine, were gluttonous, babblers, unseemly talkers, and secretly collected gold while pretending to be poor. The "four great sins"—sensuality, longing for temporary bliss in heaven, delusion, ignorance—were rampant again in the world. The "ten fetters," as they were called—self-delusion, doubt, idle works, ceremonial,

³ The rules for the friars (mendicants) are naturally stricter than for the laity, yet even in the ten commandments for the friars, moral behavior and moderation (not asceticism) are the things insisted on. These ten rules are: to abstain from destroying life; to abstain from theft; to abstain from impurity; to abstain from lying; to abstain from intoxicants; to abstain from eating at forbidden times; to abstain from dancing, singing, music, and stage-plays; to abstain from garlands, perfumes, unguents; to abstain from using a high or low bed; to abstain from receiving gold or silver. These can scarcely be called ascetic rules.

ill-will, desire for life on earth, desire for life in the formless state (hereafter), pride, self-righteousness, ignorance—these had already begun to enchain the church.

In regard to the fundamental discipline of that church we must distinguish between the lay members of the order and the friars⁴ or mendicant brothers attached to the various monasteries or living as solitary hermits. In the case of the mendicants, the “good works” demanded of all Buddhists are: to be helpful to the brethren, to exhort the laity and each other to a holy life, to conform to the few observances required, but above all to cultivate serenity, an equable mind, to learn to be free, and so to prepare for the salvation which follows enlightenment. Neither cynicism nor quietism is the ideal sought. “Joy” and “happiness” are often emphasized as the desirable fruit of mental discipline. The active mind, a will not repressed but directed aright—such are the points insisted upon. Asceticism, even in the monastery, is of too mild a character to deserve the term. The “lone ascetic” of a later period claims indeed to be a Buddhist, but his boast that he is like a wild beast in the jungle contradicts his claims, since it is opposed in essence to the ideal of Buddha himself. This ideal was that of the kindly, intelligent man who has himself renounced the world, but lives with men to aid them by raising them to a higher level. The chief concern of such a man is freedom from all ties, independence, self-culture, the saving (from rebirth) of his own self.⁵ But for the laity there is another norm. Upon these members of the church, the general congregation, is enjoined, together with the cultivation of an equable mind and the practice of cultivating the intellect, the performance of good works. The “seven conditions of the order’s prosperity” are: “mental activity, search after truth, energy, joy, peace, earnest contemplation, and equanimity.” The lay brother is to be actively beneficent. He is not obliged to abandon home, but to “maintain his parents, to cherish son and wife, to give alms and live righteously, to cherish his relatives, to be diligent in

⁴ Neither “friar” nor “monk” accurately translates the original. The mendicant brother of the order was free to leave it when he wished and to return at any time.

⁵ To repress the lower animal self in order to save oneself from reindividualization, eventually the suppression of self in any form.

righteous acts, to possess a mind unshaken by worldly vicissitudes, to seek truth and science." The three fundamental doctrines subscribed to by all are those of impermanence (all is transitory) sorrow inherent in individuality, and the non-reality of soul as an abiding principle. These truths and the Four Noble Truths,⁶ that individuality is sorrow, that sorrow arises from desire, that desire's extinction leads to the extinction of sorrow, that desire's extinction is accomplished by following the eightfold path (explained above)—are the chief tenets of Buddhism.

⁶ Compare, for a fuller exposition of these principles, Professor Rhys Davids, *American Lectures* and *Manual on Buddhism*; also Professor Oldenberg's *Buddha*.

[To be completed in the next number, with an estimate of Buddhism, and a statement of its message to Christians.]